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O PERIODICAL PUBLICATIONS

PERIODICAL PUBLICATIONS are peculiar to modern times ; and are the most remarkable productions of the art of Printing. Before the introduction of that most valuable art, indeed, they could not have existed at all, and the want of them must have deprived society of many conveniences with which we are now so familiar, that we can scarcely estimate their importance. When every book was a manuscript, and every copy required to be transcribed by the pen of an individual, it is difficult to conceive how editions of works could have been multiplied. In those days, accordingly, libraries were rare, and were possessed only by the rich and the curious : while the largest of them were small in comparison with modern collections. An ancient volume was literally a roll, commonly of parchment, including but a single tract, or section of a modern book ; several hundreds of which would scarcely form one of our common folios. The press would thus have prodigiously curtailed the dimensions of the largest libraries. Had the 700,000 volumes in the celebrated Alexandrian Library been printed, it probably would not have surpassed many of our public collections.

Without the facilities arising from Printing, especially from the Periodical Press, it is still more difficult to conceive how literary information could have been circulated. We know that it was often but slowly and partially diffused, while the various methods adopted for communicating it, exhibit a striking contrast between ancient and modern manners. One instance will be readily recollected. At the public

games of Greece, not only did the most celebrated poets bring forward their best pieces, particularly tragedies and odes, to be publicly recited in competition for prizes ; but prose writers of all kinds took advantage of the vast assemblies, to repeat before them their various productions, as the most likely method of bringing them into notice. These celebrated institutions, besides promoting various political purposes, were thus rendered the vehicles of literary information, and served, in fact, as a kind of substitute for the press.

Amid all the splendour of such exhibitions, it is easy to see how unsuitable they would be to modern manners : while they are happily rendered unnecessary, by simpler and more convenient contrivances. What would the inhabitants of these countries think of suspending their business, and repairing in crowds to Newmarket, and similar scenes, not only for amusement, but for collecting the public news ; and during the intervals of the races, assembling in the theatres to hear the newest poems repeated in a kind of recitativo, and unpublished prose works read aloud by the authors themselves ? It is certainly less dazzling to the imagination, but it is unspeakably more convenient and comfortable, merely to lounge of an evening in the News-room, or to sit at home in our parlours, till our favourite Periodicals be handed in ; and in an easy pick-tooth attitude, receive as much news, civil, political, and literary, as an ancient Greek could collect by travelling to Olympia, to Delphi, or to the Isthmus of Corinth.

These considerations naturally lead us to reflect with gratitude on the advantages resulting from the numerous periodical publications now circulated over the country : to a few of which only we can at present advert, suggested principally by the circumstances already mentioned. The advantages, indeed, are connected with periodical publications of all kinds, Newspapers, Reviews, and Magazines, which evidently serve some common purposes.

These Periodicals diffuse knowledge of all kinds over the country with amazing rapidity.—This may be ascribed, generally, to the art of Printing ; which has produced effects similar to those resulting from the application of machinery to manufactures. But what the steam engine is among machines, periodical publications are among the productions of the press. Among other effects, they facilitate the intercourse of society. They bring the most remote districts into contact, and convert a whole empire into one city, in which the inhabitants receive intelligence of the various occurrences, as if they happened in adjoining streets. The ra-

pidity with which such publications convey information of all kinds, would be scarcely credible to those who have not experienced it. To use the comparison of an old writer, they are like whispering galleries, that convey the faintest sound to a distance, the moment it is uttered. "They take the sound out of your mouth in London, and they make it to be heard at the Land's End."

The speedy communication of intelligence concerning public events, especially in great emergencies, is often important both to statesmen and private individuals: and the contrivances sometimes employed for transmitting it, display the resources of modern art. But the communication of literary information is as rapid, and frequently awakens equal interest. The discoveries in the useful arts, the improvements in science, and all the great movements in literary circles, are given to the public almost as soon as they exist.—Nay—"coming events cast their shadows before." The earliest and slightest indications of any interesting production are caught from a thousand watch towers; and notice is instantly transmitted along the whole line of telegraphic communication.

Periodical publications introduce many individuals, in different classes of society, to an acquaintance with subjects to which they would not otherwise attend. They lead professional men beyond the sphere of their peculiar studies; while they present to the busy and the gay, general but useful views of the different departments of literature, as well as of topics connected with life and manners. It is pleasing to see them of late descending even to the lower orders of society, and cherishing among them a taste for improvement, similar to that which they have extensively diffused over other circles. We have often seen a plain man shrug his shoulders in despair at the view of a large library, and even a large volume, whose eye has glistened at the sight of a magazine, a newspaper, or a tract, as something more within his reach—the perusal of which has suggested a thousand useful reflections, and has sometimes allured to more extended inquiry.

Whilst knowledge is thus transmitted with the rapidity of light, it is also, like the light, spread over a wider space, and penetrates into places that would not otherwise have been visited by its rays. Such publications indeed produce effects analogous to those of the atmosphere in the system of nature; which catches the faintest rays of the sun long before his appearance in the horizon, spreads them over the earth in a thousand hues, gilds the valleys as well as the mountain tops; and after the sun has actually set, retains his departing

beams, and covers the face of nature with soft but varied beauty.

Such Publications give a new direction to the exertions of genius, and present new objects to intellectual activity.—Human industry is constantly opening up new channels for her own activities; and is supplying herself with fresh materials. She often finds her most useful employment, indeed, among her own productions. How many of the most lucrative occupations in life, have grown out of the great artificial system of trade and commerce; and how many thousands among the lower orders are furnished with profitable employment, by the very luxuries and refinements of society.—We observe a similar progress in literary exertions. As knowledge increases, intellectual occupations multiply. Subjects of all kinds are illustrated: books are written in endless variety; and multitudes of literary men appear, presenting many interesting peculiarities in their characters, their manners, and their history. All this renders it necessary to have some regular channel, for communicating information on such a variety of topics, both to professional men, and to society at large. Magazines, Reviews, and even Newspapers of a miscellaneous character, thus arise from the very excess and variety of literary productions; and, while they are useful to the public, they give a new direction to intellectual industry.

While these works grow out of this abundance, they contribute materially to its increase.—They receive the overflowings of literature, which they instantly transform and apply to various uses. They serve a purpose similar to that which is promoted by numerous arrangements in the economy of nature. The very gleanings, the waste of Nature's stores, are converted into the support of life, and sustain innumerable vegetables and animals, that add to the beauty and variety of the great system. Periodical Publications, in like manner, are supported by the scraps, the fragments, the gleanings, of literature: yet, on such food, they often become healthful, and vigorous, and beautiful.

It must be confessed, however, that they frequently resemble the ravenous tribes; and perhaps have all, less or more, a touch of a carnivorous appetite. They can scarcely look upon regular publications without manifesting a disposition to pounce upon them as their prey. At the appearance of a celebrated author, what a fluttering among the ravenous birds that instantly surround him, each eager to flesh its bill and seize the noble game! How eager are the lighter tribes to peck at him, and have the first taste of his blood, before

the larger vultures descend with fell swoop, and, like some of Homer's nobler animals, put to flight the feebler crowds, and feed alone upon the carcass, leaving only the bones and the fragments to others!

The prodigious numbers of the ravenous tribes, indeed, would almost awaken a fear, that, like the ill-favoured and lean fleshed kine in Pharoah's dream, they would eat up all around them, especially the fat and the well favoured. Yet in nature animals thrive, and have great enjoyment, even when surrounded by their enemies. In like manner, the number of literary vultures does not in the least check the abundance of authorship. Nay, authors seem often to flock about the critic, like the small birds about the hawk, to tease and to defy him by their numbers. There is one obvious principle of compensation in this strange system of destruction, that must often be contemplated with complacency. The ravenous tribes are mutual checks, by preying on one another. In our own day, the literary horizon has been often darkened by the strife of critics. Two, of lofty and daring flight, after dispersing the feebler race, have fiercely disputed with one another the dominion of the sky. But of late a third, of equal pride, and of ample pinion, whose dark shadow has made the hearts of many, even of the vulture tribe, to quail, has boldly given battle to both.*

It may be thought foolish and unfortunate in any one connected with this tribe, to expose them to reproach by an unfavourable comparison. But, while some features in their character justify such a comparison, periodical publications present more pleasing and useful qualities. While they are supported by others, they are themselves very productive. They produce much original matter, and much that would not otherwise appear. They do so in various ways. They encourage the modesty of genius, by presenting a convenient disguise under which it may act. They cherish youthful genius, by giving it an opportunity to imp its wing, in short and safe attempts, that train it to loftier flights. Nay, they draw forth the exertions of mature and practised talents, by the facilities of publication which they present. Many a respectable writer is induced to pen a short paper for a periodical work, who would be deterred from composing a book. One paper leads on almost imperceptibly to another, till the illustrations acquire regularity and fulness: in the

* The reader will immediately recollect the struggles of the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly Reviews*, that seem to have frequently acted on the generous principle, that what the one attacked the other should defend. The *Westminster Review* has lately erected a tribunal for Periodical Literature, at which both are brought into judgment.

course of which, many nascent thoughts are expanded and adorned, that were originally intended merely to be suggested; whilst others spontaneously present themselves, that would not otherwise have occurred. In this manner, many of the English classics have arisen: some of them, like the papers of Addison and Johnson, being merely re-publications from different periodicals; whilst others have grown out of the seed that was first sown and germinated there. Such works, indeed, are the nurseries of literature, in which the tender plant is raised and protected, till it acquires such native vigour, that, when transplanted to an opener situation, it grows up the ornament of the plain.

It is impossible to anticipate all the effects which the increasing circulation of such works may produce on society. Their flexibility allows them to assume so many forms, that they may ultimately bring all classes under their influence. We may merely advert to two objects with which they have a closer connexion than may at first sight appear—the diffusion of education, and the security of public privileges.

The circulation of such publications is not only a natural concomitant, but a *cause* also of the extension of education even among the lower orders.—When books were scarce, as well as large, the poor and the illiterate naturally enough regarded both them and the power of reading them, as somehow quite beyond their sphere. But, when light and varied periodicals, as well as pamphlets and tracts, swarm over the country, like insects in a summer day, they come so frequently and closely into contact with the most obscure individuals, as to provoke curiosity. A desire to be able to know something of their contents, is thus awakened in the most listless bosom; and, whenever the eye has been enabled to decypher their mystical characters, they at once present the elements of knowledge in such varied and attractive forms, that every mind finds something adapted to its capacities. The stream of knowledge is thus pouring into every corner of the country, through a thousand channels, with a rapidity and subtlety that nothing can resist; whilst those who are secretly most averse to it, are obliged to yield to its progress. Men are now determined to read as well as to think; and all that can be done is, to present to a reading community, even in the lowest circles, suitable as well as salutary materials.

The circulation of such publications also gives security to liberty, to order, and to all the privileges and best interests of society.—They give publicity to every thing valuable to the community. Nothing can escape their vigilance. Conspiracies of factious demagogues, and the plots of statesmen

—chimerical schemes of extravagant philanthropy, and the low arts of bigotry, ignorance, and selfishness—mistakes—frauds—hoaxes of all kinds—are detected and exposed as soon as they exist. The different portions of the community are brought into contact. Each society, nay, each individual, feels himself acting under the public eye. Public opinion gradually gains the ascendancy.—Thus, a fine element is spread over society, almost as extensive and subtle as the air and the light: and, like these, it becomes the medium of general communication.

Such a medium of communication is peculiarly desirable, when the community enlarges; and seems to be one of the provisions of Supreme Wisdom, with which human experience has been gradually made acquainted, for meeting the wants of extended empires, and of a highly improved state of society. In surveying the history of ancient nations, it has been often observed with regret, that they became unmanageable, disordered and weak, in proportion as they increased in size: from which it has been concluded, that liberty is only fit for small communities; while the affairs of extensive empires cannot be conducted on liberal and enlarged principles of policy. But it is worthy of notice, that the most remarkable examples of this kind were furnished in ages previous to the invention of printing, and the introduction of other plans for improving the public mind, and uniting the different portions of society. Circumstances are now essentially changed: and modern times present instances of empires of vast extent, conducting their affairs on plans of the most liberal policy, with a regularity, wisdom, and promptitude, which were not surpassed by the most rigorous and arbitrary of the ancient governments. This seems to be chiefly owing to the means employed for collecting and expressing public opinion; and giving it the ascendancy, without deranging the movements of society.

Large communities cannot meet together; nor is it desirable that they should. But meetings, on a very large scale, are not now necessary for the discussion or management of public affairs. Individuals and societies can correspond and co-operate almost as effectually apart as when together. Every proposal, every idea, every feeling interesting to the community, can at once be imparted to the different portions of the community without actually assembling them. Every thing can be submitted to public discussion, even in the retirements of the closet.—Thus without breaking up the surface of society, or disturbing the quiet of domestic life, the increasing facilities of intercourse, through the medium of the

Press, are not only scattering the seeds of knowledge to an immense extent, but strengthening the great foundation as well as bulwark of liberty and order,—*the ascendancy of public opinion.*

These reflections will be followed, in the next number, with a *History of Periodical Publications.*

It may not be unsuitable to add an extract from a work published at a time when periodicals, of a less definite kind, were very numerous, and their effects on society less extensively felt.

*The Times anatomized, in several characters. By T. FORD.
London, 1647.*

The following character is given of Pamphlets, that were evidently of a periodical nature:—

“THEY are the weekly Almanacks, shewing what weather is in the State; which, like the Doves of Aleppo, carry news to every part of the kingdom. They are the silent traitors that affront majesty, and abuse all authority, under the colour of an *Imprimatur*. Ubiquitary flies, which have of late so blistered the eares of all men, that they cannot endure any solid truth. The ecchoes, whereby what is done in part of the kingdome, is heard all over. They are like the mushrooms, sprung up in a night, and dead in a day: and such is the greedinesse of men’s natures (in these Athenian dayes), of *news*, that they will rather feigne than want it.”

NEW FEELINGS; OR, LOVE’S YOUNG DREAM.

AN ORIGINAL TRANSLATION, FROM THE GERMAN OF G. A. BURGER.

How so unrestrained and strong
Does my bounding fancy play?
Has the night that circled long
Round existence, fled away?
How does this new dawn impart
Such a gladness to my heart?
From Aurora’s golden door
A heaven of blest visions floats,
And mine ear, all nature o’er,
Listens to new music notes;
Never did the sweet Spring air
Such a balmy odour bear.
Am I then within the sky?
Feast I with the heavenly train?
Does Ambrosia food supply?
Do I draughts of nectar drain?
Does young Hebe then fill up,
With the Wine of Life, my cup?
By your wond’rous power, O Love!
Do you now my life renew?
Joy, like that of those above,
Here below I have from you.—
Joy that never change shall know,
Young and gladsome, aye to flow.